

January 8, 2013

Speaker Christine C. Quinn
224 West 30th Street, Suite 1206
New York, NY
10001

Re: Campaign Finance Law

Dear Speaker Quinn:

We are writing to urge you to consider amending the Campaign Finance Law in response to an interpretation of the City Charter by the Campaign Finance Board. We believe the current interpretation will stifle civic participation and cause less citizen interest and participation in city elections.

In November 2010, New York City voters approved an amendment to the City Charter requiring the disclosure of independent expenditures by individuals and groups who seek to persuade voters on candidates and referenda on the ballot. Unfortunately, the Board took an overly restrictive interpretation of the amendment that will harm the ability of membership groups to communicate with their members.

Therefore, we encourage you to support legislation that:

- Excludes from the definition of independent expenditure communications between a membership organization and its members. This is consistent with federal law that does not consider internal membership communications to be independent expenditures.
- Narrows the definition of coordination to allow membership organizations to share information received from candidates without having to treat the membership communication as an in-kind contribution. Under federal law, coordinated membership communications are excluded from the definition of an in-kind contribution.

As the NAACP New York State Conference stated its December 7, 2012 letter to you, “We cannot support the disclosure of internal communications between organizations and their own members. Organizations like ours strive to increase civic participation amongst our members by communicating with members about important public policy. Any regulation that hampers our ability to speak to our own members weakens important internal discourse.”

We believe the City Council should amend the Campaign Finance Law to clarify that membership communications are not regulated as independent expenditures and/or in-kind contributions.

Respectfully,

Abby Levine
Legal Director of Advocacy Programs